

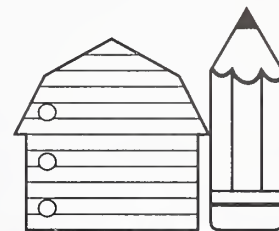
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# Ag in the Classroom

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture



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# Notes

A bi-monthly newsletter for the Agriculture in the Classroom Program. Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to help students understand the important role of agriculture in the United States economy. For information, contact the AITC Director, Room 4307, South Bldg., USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250-0991. 202/720-7925.

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## Texas Volunteers Reach Urban Audiences With Ag's Message

Kids today don't see grandma at her farm anymore. Instead, they visit her condo at the beach. As America becomes more urban, the challenge of telling agriculture's story becomes more important—and more difficult. But the Texas AgriFood Masters (TAM) program is one effective model of educational outreach in an urban community.

The program was started in 1991 by Andy Vestal, then a County Extension Agent in San Antonio. In that year, the National Extension Service's Council for Strategic Planning addressed the need for making urban residents more aware of the importance of agriculture. "Urban residents must be assisted in understanding agriculture, and Extension has an important public policy role to play, particularly in the areas of biotechnology, food safety, and the uses of natural resources," said the report. The Council went on to encourage Extension agents in urban areas to conduct "fundamental programs to develop a sound understanding among the population about modern agriculture—how it works and what it takes to make it function effectively."

With that in mind, Vestal met with other Extension agents and began asking a series of questions. "Could we develop a series of seminars about modern agriculture, natural resource conservation issues, food safety, biotechnology and other important issues? Were there enough people living in the city who would come to these classes? And in return for the instruction we would

provide, could we ask them to participate in at least 12 educational projects within the subsequent twelve-month period after the training?

"What we learned," says Vestal, "was that the answer to all those questions was yes." There are a lot of people living in urban settings today who share a deep appreciation for our nation's food and fiber system. They work for educational institutions, utility companies, medical offices, in

*Continued on page 7*



*A volunteer from the Texas AgriFood Masters program makes agriculture come to life for urban students.*

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## From the Director:

Something amazing occurred this past summer! I was visiting the Summer Teacher Institute conducted by Pennsylvania Ag in the Classroom. On their last night at Penn State, I joined about thirty teachers and several coordinators for the evening's social event at a local night spot. As in many of these locations, along with the dancing and beverages, there is a television tuned to a seasonal sports event. For reasons unknown, the television channel ran a story on cattle.

One of the teachers noticed, pointed, and yelled, "Hey, look!" Suddenly, and spontaneously, thirty teachers began to cheer for the cattle on the television. The night spot came to a standstill.

Rest assured that prior to their Ag in the Classroom training, not a single one of these teachers would have even noticed those television cows—much less cheered. I was speechless!

For all those who expend time and energy planning and conducting these summer programs for teachers, your hard work is not in vain. This is one glowing example of Ag in the Classroom developing not only an understanding of agriculture but an interest and an appreciation of agriculture!

If you haven't already done so, please mark May 14-18, 1996 on your calendars for the National Ag in the Classroom conference in Monterey, California. Look for the details in our next issue of "Notes."

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth A. Wolanyk*

Elizabeth A. Wolanyk  
Director

## Kit Helps Students Learn About Animals and Clothing

Whether it's a polar explorer looking for an insulating lining for a sleeping bag (goosedown) or a skydiver who wants a fabric that is light enough to float in the air but strong enough to support the weight of a human being (silk), people depend on animals to meet many of their needs. A new educational kit, "Animals and Our Clothing," highlights wool, leather, silk, fur, and goosedown clothing.

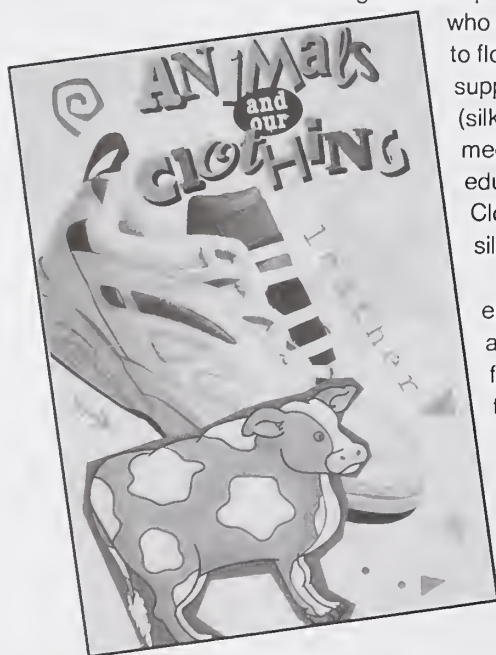
Developed for students in upper elementary school, the kit promotes an understanding about animal fibers, the species that produce them, and the contributions they make. It has been designed to:

- build a general awareness of animal-human interdependence and a respect for the contributions animals make to human life;

- help students understand that clothing and many other products they value come from animals;
- build recognition of the species that provide wool, leather, down, silk, and fur;
- emphasize the ethic of respect for animals and the need for responsible animal care.

The kit, which can be integrated into language arts, social studies, geography, and math, includes six brightly colored bulletin board posters. Other components are a teacher's guide, a mini-magazine, "Fur 'n Fiber Times," which contains a crossword puzzle and various games that reinforce the information contained in the material, and nine reproducible sheets presenting factual information and activities related to each natural fiber.

Some kits will be distributed free to teachers. Others are available for \$10 from the Fur Commission USA, 225 East Sixth Street, St. Paul, MN 55101; 612-222-1080.



*This four-color poster is part of a teaching kit, "Animals and Our Clothing," that promotes an understanding about animal fibers.*





## Video Highlights Biological Control

One of the oldest methods of controlling agricultural pests is also on the leading edge of agricultural technology. A video, "Biological Control: Learning to Live With the Natural Order," helps students understand how scientists and farmers can use biological control to help manage pest populations.

Produced by the National Biological Control Institute, the 25-minute video includes stunning visual footage that takes students on a journey around the world—and into the microscopic world of insects.

Students learn that the dramatic increases in food grown per acre is a result of farmers' ability to control pests and diseases. A combination of pest control techniques called *Integrated Pest Management* (IPM) is now in wide use. The video tells students that IPM offers many benefits for farmers: it provides long-term, economical management of pests; it is selective, with a minimal impact on other species; and it is safe.

In a segment titled "From Russia With Bugs," the video uses a parody of a secret-agent film to help students understand how an agricultural pest

can damage agricultural crops—and how scientific research is controlling the pest. They trace the movement of Russian Wheat Aphid, which by 1983 was responsible for more than \$100 million a year in lost income to farmers in 17 western states.

The video follows USDA scientists, who travel to Russia to collect more than 30 natural enemies of the aphid, raise them in quarantine, ensure that these new predators will not harm the environment, and then distribute them to farmers. Close-up photography allows students to see how natural predators like the ladybird beetle destroy the Russian Wheat Aphid.

The video does not specify the limitations of biological control. It also does not inform students that IPM may include the use of chemical pest control.

"Biological Control" is appropriate for middle and high school students. Free copies are available by contacting the National Biological Control Institute, USDA/APHIS/OA 4700 River Road, Unit 5, Riverdale, MD 20737-1229. Or, if you have access to the Internet, place an order at the NBCI Store (<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/nbci/nbci.html>).



*A lady beetle devours aphids, one of the methods of biological pest control demonstrated in a new video from the National Biological Control Institute.*

## An Apple For the Teacher?

### These Materials Can Be Used Every Day

Did you know that an apple was the cause of the Trojan War? Or that if you peel an apple and throw the peel over your shoulder, it will form the initial of your lover's name?

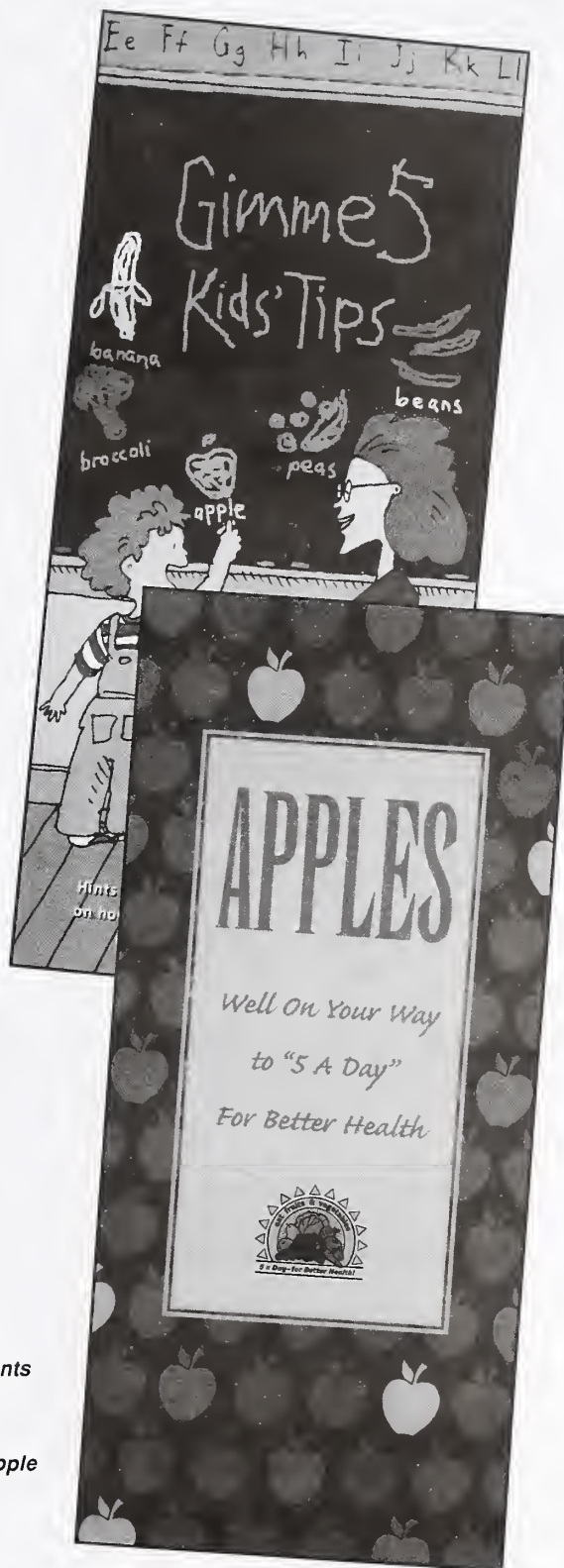
These "juicy stories" are just some of the information about apples contained in materials developed by the International Apple Institute. Teachers and students can learn facts about apples—for example, that nearly 100 varieties are grown commercially in the United States, with the Red Delicious variety the most popular. They can learn about the U.S. apple industry. Apples are grown commercially in 36 states. Americans eat over 100 apples per person each year.

For nutrition lessons, the Institute offers "kid-tested" tips on how to encourage elementary school students to eat at least five servings a day of fruits and vegetables. Among the hints in the brochure "Gimme 5 Kids' Tips":

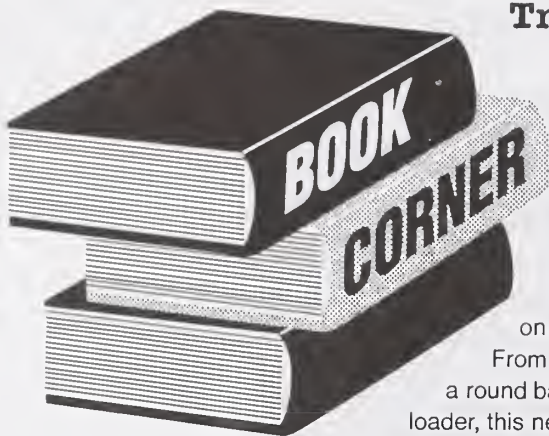
- Masquerade your mango—combine unfamiliar fruits and vegetables with those kids already know. As one elementary student commented, "Sneak it in their food. Put a vegetable like broccoli in something I like."
- Dip it, dunk it—combine fruits and vegetables with low-fat dressings.
- Set an example—children model what they see their parents do. One student noted, "Sometimes grownups don't set the right examples—they don't eat fruits and vegetables."

Also available are coloring books and stickers. For a complete menu of the materials available through the Apple Institute, and a price list, write the International Apple Institute, 6707 Old Dominion Drive, Suite 320, P.O. Box 1137, McLean, VA 22101; 703-442-8850.

*Trips to the salad bar can encourage students to eat fruits and vegetables, according to a brochure available from the International Apple Institute.*







## Tractor Book Puts Kids In the Driver's Seat

Children can climb aboard a red, green, blue, or silver tractor as they plow through the pages of *A Tractor Goes Farming*. This children's book introduces children to all the work that tractors do on today's farms.

From pulling a plow or powering a round baler to scooping with a farm loader, this new book shows the tractor performing many tasks that kids have probably not seen.

The book begins in the spring, when tractors pull plows to turn over the soil and use field

cultivators to prepare the soil for planting. It moves through the growing season as tractors pull rakes, balers, and even a snow blower.

The full-color photographs give students the feeling of being in the driver's seat. Author Roy Harrington, who worked as an engineer developing farm equipment, understands that children are fascinated by tractors. His short, simple sentences can be easily read by most children in grades 1-3.

*A Tractor Goes Farming* shows a variety of tractor makes and models. It is published by the American Society for Agricultural Engineering. Single copies of the 32-page book are \$5.96 plus \$3.50 for shipping and handling. To order, send check or credit card information to ASAE, 2950 Niles Road, St. Joseph, MI 49085, or call 800-695-2723.

*What do tractors do on farms? Just about everything, as a new book by Roy Harrington shows young readers.*





real estate, and in banking—over 80 percent of TAM volunteers come from outside agriculture.

Using the Master Gardener program as a model, the Texas AgriFood Masters program began with that first eight-week class of volunteers. Today, the program has expanded to more than 165 volunteers in five Texas cities, with a goal of reaching into 20 urban areas before the year 2000. The volunteers have proved to be very effective at communicating with urban audiences. "The fact that our volunteers are the peers of our target audience—the urban consumer—gives the information we share through them great credibility," Vestal observes.

AgriFood Masters concentrate their educational efforts in four areas:

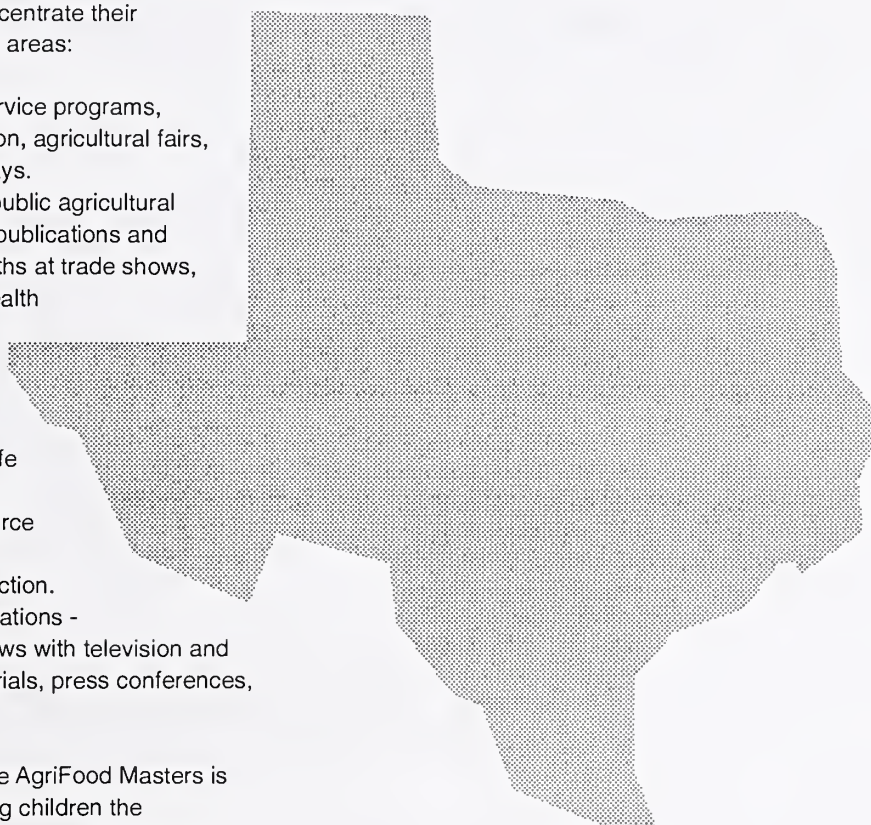
1. Youth - teacher inservice programs, curriculum distribution, agricultural fairs, tours, and career days.
2. Industry relations - public agricultural tours, agribusiness publications and luncheons, and booths at trade shows, conventions, and health fairs.
3. Public speaking - on topics that include biotechnology, wildlife management, food safety, natural resource conservation, and environmental protection.
4. News and media relations - newsletters, interviews with television and radio stations, editorials, press conferences, and photography.

A popular project of the AgriFood Masters is an agricultural fair, offering children the opportunity for hands-on learning about various agricultural topics. But before TAM will sponsor a fair, the school and or the school district must demonstrate that they are using one of the agricultural curricula that AgriFood Masters support—principally Ag in the Classroom materials or Texas' Project Teach. In this way, agriculture becomes an integral part of what the school teaches, not just a one-day special event.

As an unexpected side benefit, the media coverage of one of the fairs is generally excellent—and often serves as the group's best

recruiting tool. "We have found that urban media really like stories and pictures about plants and kids, animals and kids, or agriculture and kids," Vestal says. "The day after one of these stories runs, we can count on several more inquiries."

Vestal and TAM work closely with the Texas Ag in the Classroom program. Tad Duncan, the state contact, says the group has proved to be an invaluable resource in reaching students and teachers. "They train teachers and also have wonderful follow-up activities for students such as ag fairs. I can't say enough good about them," he notes.



If you have access to the Internet, you can learn more about TAM by visiting the group's home page (<http://http.tamu.edu:8000/~pullen1/tam.html>), or on e-mail ([t-vestal@tamu.edu](mailto:t-vestal@tamu.edu)).

His mailing address is

107 Scoates Bldg.

Texas A & M University

College Station, TX 77843.

The phone number is 409-862-3013.

The individuals listed here are key reference persons in each state. If you have any questions, want to make reports, or need more information about your state's Ag in the Classroom program, contact the following:

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